

## CONSERVATION

THE ORANG-UTAN AND RHINOCEROS IN SUMATRA;  
FROM TWO PRELIMINARY REPORTS

by

OLIVER MILTON

*on World Wildlife Fund Project No. 35, April and July 1963.*

Two of the recommendations which were adopted by the First World Conference on National Parks in Seattle (U.S.A.) during July 1962 were: —

1. "The First World Conference on National Parks recommends the early examination by the I.U.C.N. of a project to create within the natural range of certain gravely threatened species—rhinoceros, orang-utan, Arabian oryx (et al.)—one or more special reserves into which individual animals can be moved so as to promote increased reproduction of the species, and further invites the Governments concerned and other appropriate agencies to give sympathetic consideration to the project.
2. The First World Conference on National Parks warmly welcomes and endorses the proposed world campaign for rhinoceroses sponsored by the World Wildlife Fund and the Fauna Preservation Society in cooperation with the Survival Service Commission of the I.U.C.N. and recommends that the Governments of the nations concerned consider the establishment of additional parks and reserves to incorporate areas in which rhinoceros still survive."

Mr. Milton, who was granted permission by the Indonesian Government to carry out a survey of the rhinoceros and orang-utan in Sumatra and Kalimantan (Indonesian Borneo), started his field work in January 1963, with a grant from the World Wild-life Fund, in the hope that the information obtained would give encouragement in implementing the above recommendations. The present reports deal with that part of the work which was carried out in north and central Sumatra. The two areas covered are shown in the map. The choice of the northern state of Atjeh was suggested by a previous visit made to this region by Dr. C. R. Carpenter in 1937. Although much of the area was covered at that time, and particular attention was paid to the status of the orang-utan and rhinoceros, it was not then possible to investigate the Gajo and Alas areas near the almost unknown Loser Reserve. These two areas were therefore the object

of the first field trip; a second excursion was made to the neighbourhood of Lake Toba, and the north Sumatran phase of the project ended with a visit to the north-east coastal areas near Kuala Simpang and the mountainous region west of Medan near Bukit Lawang. This covered the period from January to March, 1963. In May, the survey was extended to an area of central Sumatra near Pekanbaru, from which region specimens of rhinoceros were captured for the Basel and Copenhagen zoos about 4 years ago. The field work here unfortunately had to be terminated after one month, owing to an accident in which Mr. Milton was badly cut on some bamboo.

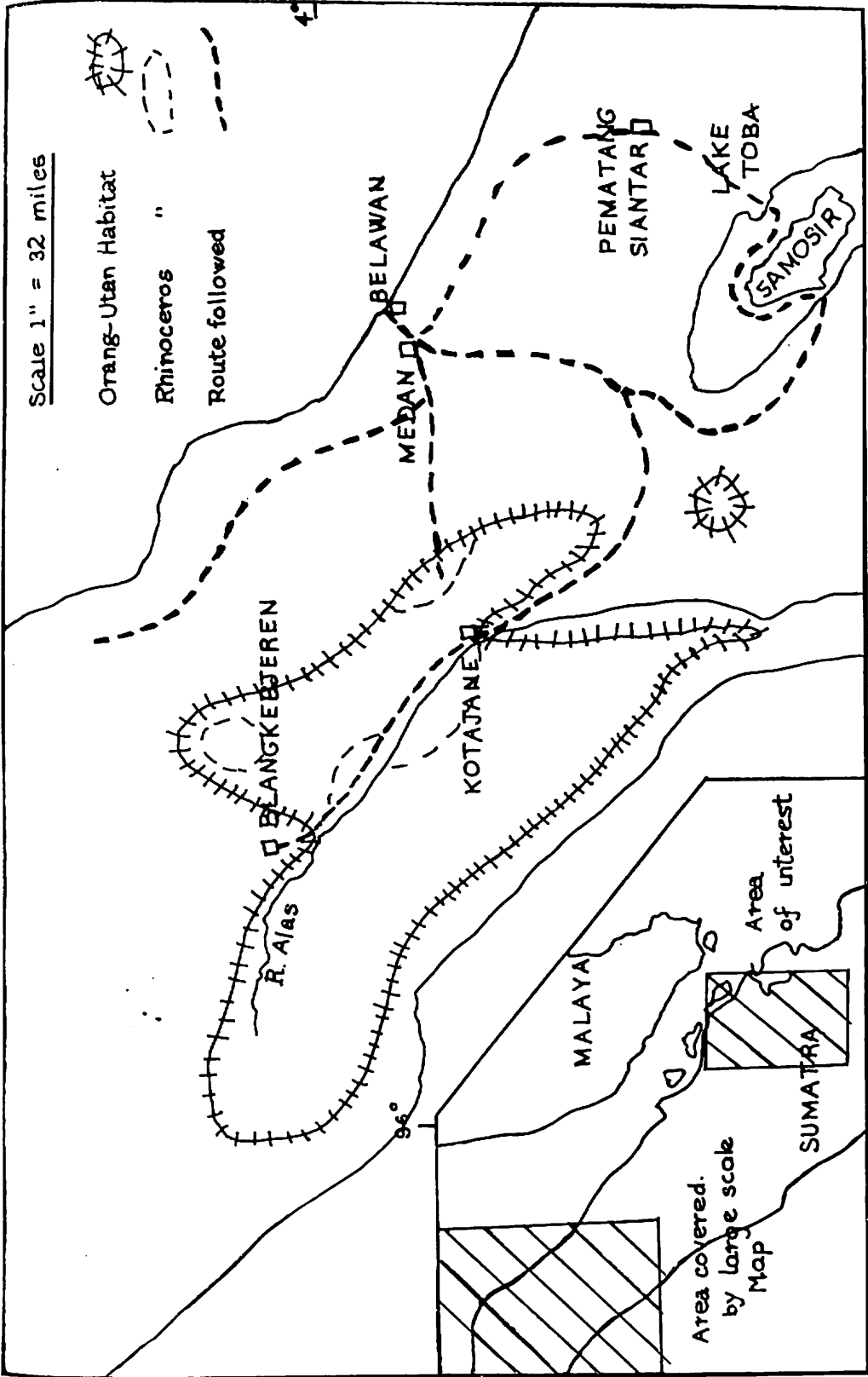
The Loser Reserve covers 1,700 square miles and forms part of the great mountainous mass of unexplored primeval jungle in southwest Atjeh. The highest point reaches 11,300 feet at Mount Loser near the north end of the reserve. Except in the immediate neighbourhood of the two small towns of Kotajane and Blankerjeren, the land is almost uninhabited. The area in central Sumatra is completely different, rising from swamp forest to a few stretches of undulating hills about 300-400 feet above sea level. There is a great deal of human activity, and the thick jungle that covers the higher parts is being increasingly cut down to make land available for cultivation.

The rhinoceros is apparently extremely rare in Central Sumatra. There was no evidence of illegal hunting, but extensive felling of primary jungle is forcing the animal to leave its former habitat, and to retreat to remoter areas. Mr. Milton was not able to estimate the number that might still survive in these places, well guarded by swamp forest, which the natives are very unwilling to visit. There were no reports on signs of orang-utan in the area covered.

The Loser region, on the other hand, appears to be the main, and possibly the last, important stronghold of both animals, although small groups have been reported from further north. The main threat to their continued existence arises from indiscriminate hunting. It was particularly difficult for Mr. Milton to obtain information about the rhinoceros, since the only people who knew about it were just those engaged in illegal hunting. These, naturally, were not anxious to reveal any secrets. However, nine specific places were mentioned as being frequented by rhino, and in at least three of these they were said to be "by no means uncommon". On this basis, and taking into account the fact that almost nothing is known about their status in the more remote areas of the reserve, the total population is estimated as being between 30 and 50 animals—a dangerously small number. The figures for the orang-utan population were

estimated from the number of nests observed in a known area, combined with information on the number of nests constructed by each animal per day, the length of time for which they remain visible, and the total area likely to be inhabited. These calculations suggest a population of between 800 and 1,500 in the Alas and Gajo areas; Mr. Milton believes that the lower figure is more realistic. There are three other areas in northern Sumatra which are known to contain orang-utan, so the figure of 1,500 is suggested as being not unreasonable for the whole region. The amount of smuggling that goes on—at least 280 animals have been taken in the last two years—constitutes a very grave threat to this small population.

Mr. Milton recommends that an appropriate part of the Loser region should be selected as a special reserve for orang-utan and rhinoceros as soon as possible; but he doubts whether the Government has funds to engage men to patrol such an area. As an interim measure, in view of the threat which smuggling is offering to the existence of these rare animals, he makes several proposals aimed at checking such activities. These include severe fines for anyone illegally owning an orang-utan, surprise checks on the roads leading from the Loser complex to the coast, and co-operation from the Customs and other appropriate departments in Indonesia itself and in Singapore, Hong Kong and Bangkok, to which ports the animals are usually shipped.



Map showing areas where Orang-utan and Rhinoceros are said to occur in North and Central Sumatra.